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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1978
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 0007
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0127
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 6692
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JEDDAH 000496

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RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN, DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP,
INR/B; USTR FOR PBURKHEAD

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: A GLIMPSE INTO JEDDAH'S FOREIGN WORKER POPULATIONS

REF: A. JEDDAH 000100

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In a series of meetings with the labor offices of Saudi Arabia's major labor source Consulates, EconOff discussed the issues facing foreign worker populations and what the representative Consulates General do to help their citizens. The labor officers all say salary payment and work environment are major issues for their citizens but none work with the Saudi government to improve the situation. They also agree that agitation against employers is not the best way to resolve problems for workers because it hurts the labor source country more than it will improve the work conditions in Saudi Arabia. End Summary.

INDIA

¶2. (C) On July 15 EconOff met Mr. Cyril Tigga, head of the Community Welfare Section (CWS) at the Indian Consulate. Tigga said that there are 1.5 million Indians in Saudi Arabia, half of whom are in Jeddah. Most of the Indians coming to Saudi Arabia, the majority of whom are male, gain employment via agencies in India. Tigga estimates that 80 percent are doing semi-skilled and skilled work such as store clerks and construction while the other 20 percent are professional workers such as doctors, and office workers. The few women workers from India generally work as nurses and housemaids in the Kingdom.

¶3. (C) Tigga stated that overall the number of Indian workers coming to Saudi Arabia is decreasing because of Saudization efforts but he said that the largest problem confronting Indian workers in Saudi Arabia is getting paid by their employers. CWS tries to alleviate this problem by doing a background check on companies to look at their financial standing, fairness of their contracts, and ensuring that there is an actual position for the requested worker. If an Indian has an issue with his employer, his only option is to go through the Saudi legal system for resolution. CWS officers often accompany their citizens to court to provide

translation services and give legal advice. The CWS also has a private fund generated from contributions from the Indian community to help destitute Indians get basic necessities or in the case of deportation, leave the country.

14. (C) Tigga feels that given the choice, Indian workers would not strike or protest against their employers because they would be immediately deported. Currently striking is prohibited by the employee's contracts. Tigga said that despite this environment, the welfare of Indian workers in Saudi Arabia has improved over time, especially after King Abdullah's visit to India (reftel A). However, Tigga said that he has no communication with the Saudi Labor Ministry about improving the situation of expatriate laborers.

PAKISTAN

15. (C) On July 16 EconOff met Mr. Shaukat Ali and Dr. Nawaz Ahmad, Community Welfare Attaches at the Consulate General of Pakistan. Ahmad estimates there are about one million Pakistanis in the Kingdom, mostly in Jeddah due to increased job opportunities and a better living environment. Most of the Pakistani workers are unskilled, working as laborers in the construction sector. Ali said that the Pakistani government is starting a training program to give Pakistanis more skills before they work abroad so they will be able to find better jobs. He also said Saudization has negatively affected the Pakistani worker population which was decreasing in the last two years, but this is no longer a concern because of the rise in economic activity. Both men are excited about Saudi Arabia's current economic environment and

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said their government hopes to provide more manpower to Saudi Arabia as more projects come online, especially the construction of the Economic Cities.

16. (C) Most of the Pakistani workers come to the Kingdom through employment agencies but some use umra visas to enter and then search for employment upon arrival. Ali and Ahmad said that aside from salary payments, general employee grievances are the largest issue that they handle, primarily because workers have difficulty adjusting to life as a foreign worker in Saudi Arabia. They said that they have a specific issue with workers in the education field because their work environment is often not what they expected. (Note: When pressed further on this issue, neither gentleman would not elaborate. End Note.) To resolve problems with their employers, Pakistanis also have to use the Saudi court system. Ali said while this process is lengthy, they are usually able to positively resolve the problem. Sponsors are vetted by the CWS in similar manner to the Indians, however Ali and Ahmad stressed that they put the onus on the Pakistani national to know what his contract says and to not break the terms of his agreement.

17. (C) When asked about worker protests occurring across the Gulf, both men stated that they do not advise their citizens to strike against their employers because it is not worth it in the long run. Ali said that strikes by Pakistani workers would not only end the participants' employment prospects in the Kingdom and they risk deportation, but it also makes it difficult for the Pakistani government's relations with the Kingdom.

PHILIPPINES

18. (C) On July 17 EconOff met Mr. Bulyok Nilong, Labor Attach at the Philippine Consulate. Nilong is a veteran of Philippine-Gulf labor issues having served previously in Kuwait and Iraq. He estimates there are 260 to 300 thousand Filipinos in the Western Region. Most Filipinos are working

semi-skilled and skilled jobs from store clerks to computer technicians. There is also a large population of Filipino housemaids who are Nilong's major issue in the Kingdom. He also is not concerned about the Saudization process because he feels that skilled Filipinos will always be in demand because they work harder, are cheaper, and are better trained than Saudis.

¶9. (C) Nilong says that citizens who are employed by large companies generally do not have as many labor grievances because they have better jobs and are not subject to the extreme work conditions of unskilled labor. When there is a labor issue, he generally tries to resolve the matter with the employer without going through the Saudi legal system. Nilong stated that the threat of being blacklisted usually provides an avenue for both parties to reach a compromise. Filipinos are also protected because most come to the Kingdom through employment agencies who are also responsible in Manila for grievances that arise with employers. The employment agencies can be taken to court in the Philippines for workers to resolve their problems. This does not happen very often because the Filipino Labor Ministry now accredits most of the employment agencies for finding proper sponsors.

¶10. (C) Housemaids are a different issue because they are employed by individuals who cannot be checked as thoroughly. Nilong says that often there are issues of abuse and non-payment of salary; he gave one example of a maid who over 18 years had only been paid 40 thousand riyals and was not allowed to leave the home. The woman was eventually rescued by the Consulate and sent back to the Philippines. Nilong says that the Consulate General often houses maids who have run away from their employers. The Philippines in 1990 stopped allowing maids to come to Saudi Arabia because they were treated so badly but that did not last long because Manila wanted to keep positive relations with the Kingdom.

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¶11. (C) Nilong said that he also does not interact with the Saudi government on labor issues and says that he tries to avoid the legal system because the process is lengthy, slow, and is not as successful as working with the employer directly. Instead of risking deportation, he advises Filipino workers to work with the Consulate General to resolve grievances instead of striking or protesting. He believes this will never happen because foreign laborers are afraid to strongly agitate on labor issues and do not want to risk deportation.
Gfoeller